

Some Frequently Asked Questions about the  
Harrisonburg Southeast Connector

- Q. Why are you still studying this project? Why don't you listen to the majority of citizens from the previous public meetings who opposed this project?**
- A.** VDOT is required to study the project due to its inclusion in the Virginia Transportation Act of 2000, the Six-Year Plan, and in response to requests from local governments and elected representatives.
- Q. What about the work and recommendations made by the citizen advisory group-- the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Highway Advisory Committee? This group was active in 2000 and 2001 and produced several recommendations for addressing a potential connector road.**
- A.** The recommendations made by the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Highway Advisory Committee will be closely reviewed and evaluated.
- Q. Can't you just fix the existing roads without building a new one?**
- A.** As part of this study, VDOT will study the feasibility and costs of improving existing roadways in order to meet the transportation needs.
- Q. Why does it take VDOT so long to plan a highway?**
- A.** It may seem like a long time. However, VDOT must follow many required laws and regulations, collect substantial amounts of information, carefully consider all relevant factors, consult with citizens and elected officials, coordinate with other government agencies, develop and consider a range of alternatives, and fully document all these efforts. In short, highway planning in this day and age is a complex process that takes time to complete.
- Q. When would anything approved in this Study actually be built?**
- A.** Before any construction could occur, the environmental process has to be completed. If a 'build' option is selected, design and construction documents must also be prepared and the right of way acquired. The entire process could take ten years, assuming funding availability.
- Q. How much will the entire project cost?**
- A.** It depends entirely on the alternative decided upon by the Commonwealth Transportation Board. Costs would vary greatly: the No-Build or 'Do-Nothing' Alternative would cost nothing. If a build solution is selected, costs will depend on the type of facility (e.g. type of access-control, interchange vs. intersection), the number of access points, and the number of lanes. The Draft EIS will include cost estimates for different alternatives.
- Q. What is the "No-Build" alternative?**
- A.** The No-Build alternative is to take no action other than what is already scheduled. VDOT produces a Six-Year Plan listing projects it will implement for the next six years. If the No-Build alternative is selected, projects listed in the VDOT's Six-Year Plan would be implemented. Also, in metropolitan areas, the No-Build alternative assumes implementation of other committed projects included the Metropolitan Planning Organization's long range plan.
- Q. Have you already decided where to build the road?**
- A.** VDOT has not made, and will not make, the decision on where to build any new road. VDOT compiles factual information to meet National Environmental Policy Act requirements for impartial review of all alternatives, including No-Build. Citizens who make up the Commonwealth Transportation Board, a body appointed by the Governor, make the ultimate decisions regarding the implementation of any build alternative. The decision will not be made until the appropriate stage of the National Environmental Policy Act process. That stage will follow completion of the Draft EIS and the Location Public Hearing. In addition, since VDOT would likely use federal funds for the project, the Federal Highway Administration would have to agree with the Commonwealth Transportation Board's decision.
- Q. Is there funding to construct?**
- A.** As of today, there is no funding for construction of the Harrisonburg Southeast Connector. Once an alternative is selected, VDOT will examine possible funding sources. Allocations of funding for construction are made annually with the update of the Six-Year Plan.
- Q. Are bike paths or transit being considered in this study?**
- A.** Multiple modes and locations are being considered. It is difficult, at this early stage, to determine which alternatives will best address the transportation problems.

HARRISONBURG  
Southeast  
Connector

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Cross Keys Battlefield

HARRISONBURG SOUTHEAST CONNECTOR

Location Study

Public Scoping Meeting- July 22, 2004 Turney Ashby High School

*The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) is conducting a location study for the Southeast Harrisonburg Connector. The study area is shown on the map. We need your help in identifying key issues to be included in the study.*

Project Background

Since the 1980s, transportation needs have been studied and discussed for the area southeast of Harrisonburg between I-81 and U.S. Route 33. The Harrisonburg Area Transportation Study (HATS), first published in 1996 and revised in 1999, included a long-range transportation plan. The plan included a eastern bypass that, in the latest revision, would link I-81 at the Route 257 interchange to U.S. Route 33 near the intersection of Route 276. This bypass, along with other bypass links around Harrisonburg included in the plan, soon came to be referred to as the "loop road."

In Year 2000, the General Assembly passed the Virginia Transportation Act. The Act included a Priority Transportation Fund that earmarked \$20 million toward projects in and near the study area, including the southeastern connector. VDOT initiated a location study for this project that subsequently was suspended. In July 2000, public meetings were sponsored to give citizens opportunities to express their views. Also, the Commonwealth Transportation Board member representing the area appointed a committee of local citizens to study transportation issues in the sector southeast of Harrisonburg and to develop recommendations on transportation solutions.

The committee submitted a combination of transportation improvements referred to as the 506 Plan.

Local governments and other interested parties continue to express a need to study the transportation problems in the area. Also, for any future improvements to qualify for federal funding, a location study would be required. This location study will identify transportation deficiencies in the study area, develop a range of potential solutions, and evaluate those solutions. An Environmental Impact Statement will be produced, which will document the transportation alternatives and their associated impacts.



# How the Location Study Process Works

## Local & Regional Transportation Planning

Before location studies are initiated, local and regional governments conduct broader-range planning to identify the needs for such studies. Rockingham County and the City of Harrisonburg recently completed updates to their long-range comprehensive plans. Both plans contain transportation elements that indicate a need for improved mobility between I-81 and Route 33 through the study area.

On a regional level, the Harrisonburg metropolitan area was recently designated a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and is currently working on its first long range plan. MPOs are established by agreement of the Governor and the local governments for each urbanized area with a population greater than 50,000. Development of the plan will include comprehensive data collection for travel patterns, travel origins and destinations, traffic volumes, and locations of congestion and other deficiencies. The new regional transportation plan will replace the HATS.

The location study will use the traffic analyses supporting the local and regional plans as the basis for identifying the project purpose and needs. VDOT will build on this work through further traffic analyses and alternative evaluation. This effort will provide a fresh look at travel issues and will define the purpose and needs for transportation improvements in the study area.

The National Environmental Policy Act is an important component of the Harrisonburg Southeast Connector Location Study process. Some components of this process include:

- Scoping
- Purpose and Need
- Alternatives Development
- Evaluation of Impacts

**Scoping** provides an early and open process for determining the range of issues to be addressed in the study and for identifying significant issues. The **Purpose and Need** describes the transportation problems identified through traffic and other related studies. **Alternatives Development** consists of two sub-components--Preliminary Alternatives and Candidate Alternatives. Preliminary Alternatives will be developed and presented at a Citizen Information Meeting next year. A wide range of preliminary alternatives will be presented for review and comment, including No-Build, Low-Build, and Improve-Existing options. After the Citizen Information Meeting, the Preliminary Alternatives are reduced or refined based on screening criteria to create Candidate Alternatives. The study team will conduct an **Evaluation of Impacts** for these alternatives. The resources analyzed include but are not limited to:

- Air Quality
- Historic Properties
- Hazardous Materials
- Indirect Impacts
- Wetlands and Stream
- Threatened and Endangered Species
- Noise
- Park, Recreation and Open Space
- Social and Economic Impacts

After the resource impacts have been analyzed for each alternative, they are documented in the **Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)**. The Draft EIS is then made available to the public for review and comment and a **Location Public Hearing** is conducted. Once the public hearing is held and the comments are received on the Draft EIS, the Commonwealth Transportation Board will select an alternative. After Commonwealth Transportation Board action, a **Final EIS** is prepared that documents the action of the Commonwealth Transportation Board and responds to substantive comments received on the Draft EIS. The Final EIS is presented to the Federal Highway Administration, who reviews it and issues a **Record of Decision**. The Record of Decision is a public document that reflects the Federal Highway Administration decision, the rationale behind that decision, and commitment to monitoring and mitigation.

### Harrisonburg Southeast Connector

#### SCHEDULE

Scoping	Spring and Summer 2004
Data Collection	Spring, Summer, Fall 2004
Citizen Information Meeting	Winter 2004-05
Draft Environmental Impact Statement	Summer 2005
Location Public Hearing	Fall 2005
Commonwealth Transportation Board Action	Winter 2005-06
Final Environmental Impact Statement	Summer 2006
Record of Decision	Summer 2006

# How Can You Help?

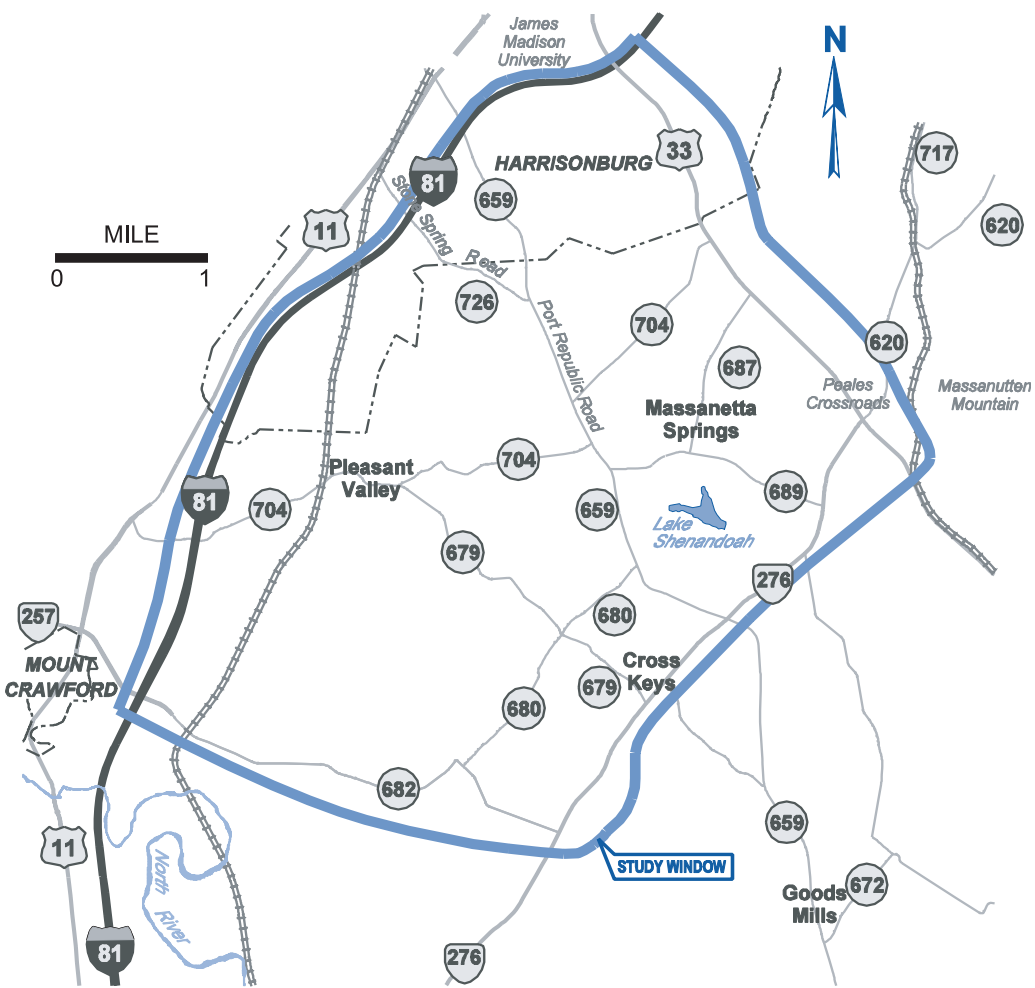
The information you provide and your insights into key issues will be important factors in the decision to be made. To ensure that all truly relevant factors are considered in this important decision, please provide any substantive and constructive comments and information you have regarding:

- **Transportation needs that should be included in the project purpose and needs statement.**
- **Alternatives that should be considered to meet those needs.**
- **Important environmental resources and impacts on those resources that should be evaluated.**

### For More Information

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Or look at the project web site at <http://www.virginiadot.org/projects/SEConnector.asp>



*It is the responsibility of VDOT to ensure that all members of the community are afforded the opportunity to participate in public decisions on transportation systems and projects affecting them. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, no person shall be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance. If you feel you have been denied participation in, or denied benefits of, or been subjected to discrimination in regard to this project development or otherwise discriminated against because of your race, color, national origin, gender, age or disability, you may contact the Virginia Department of Transportation, Office of Equal Opportunity located at 811 Commerce Road (Route 11 Bypass) in Staunton, Virginia or telephone 540-332-9075 or TDD 800-307-4630. Contact with the Office of Equal Opportunity should be as soon as possible but no later than 180 days after the alleged discrimination occurred. If there has been a continuing course of conduct, contact should be made no later than 180 days after the alleged discrimination was discontinued.*